

United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit Appellate Mediation Program Guidelines

A. Introduction

The United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit established an appellate mediation program pursuant to Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 33, which commenced on October 3, 2005. The program is being revised, effective September 18, 2006. The most important revision is that participation in the program is mandatory if a case is selected for inclusion in the program by the Circuit Mediation Officer.

A three-judge committee (“the Mediation Committee”) oversees and monitors the program. The program is administered by the Circuit Mediation Officer. The program is periodically assessed by the court.

The purpose of the program is to help the parties achieve settlement. The mediation program provides a confidential, risk-free opportunity for parties to resolve their dispute with the help of the Circuit Mediation Officer or an experienced neutral, third-party mediator. Mediation, unlike arbitration where a decision that may be binding is issued, will result in a settlement only if all parties agree on that resolution.

B. Eligible Cases

All cases where the parties are represented by counsel are eligible for the program.

C. Case Selection Process

Participation in the court’s mediation program is mandatory for all cases selected for participation in the program that were docketed after the effective date of these revised guidelines. The Circuit Mediation Officer contacts principal counsel in cases selected for mediation to determine whether the case is a good candidate for mediation and seeks the opinion of counsel regarding participation in the program. At that time, the Circuit Mediation Officer asks counsel to determine whether the appeal and, if pertinent, the cross-appeal, present any jurisdictional defects. If at the outset it appears to the Circuit Mediation Officer that mediation will not be fruitful, then court mediation efforts cease. Counsel may jointly request that a case be included in the mediation program. A Joint Request to Enter Mediation Program form is available from the clerk’s office and on the court’s web site. Such a request is directed to the Circuit Mediation Officer.

The Circuit Mediation Officer may review the notice of appeal, the trial tribunal’s docket sheet, the decision of the trial tribunal, the court’s docketing statement, and briefs to aid in selecting cases for mediation. The docketing statement is a two-page form to be completed by counsel. The form is included in the docketing packet sent to counsel by the clerk’s office. All counsel must complete the form in duplicate and return it to the clerk’s office within 14 days of docketing. The docketing statement is not part of the formal mediation process, but assists the

Circuit Mediation Officer with the selection process. One copy is retained in the clerk's office case file and the other copy is transmitted to the Circuit Mediation Officer.

D. Mediators

In appropriate cases, the Circuit Mediation Officer may serve as the mediator. In other cases, the mediator is an outside volunteer mediator. The court has selected a roster of outside mediators. The court's mediators include distinguished, experienced attorneys, and academicians with expertise in the substantive areas of the court's jurisdiction, as well as attorneys with experience mediating. The court invites more applicants. The application is available on the Federal Circuit Bar Association and the court's web sites. The candidates are encouraged to be members of the bar of the court, but are not required to be members.

Mediators and applicants must not be in active practice. Mediators are not paid for their services, but are reimbursed by the court for minor out-of-pocket expenses, such as photocopying costs, telephone charges, facsimile charges, and transportation to the courthouse. Mediation proceedings may be held in the courthouse if desired. Reimbursement for reasonable travel and lodging expenses of the mediator is assumed by the litigants if the mediator must travel to conduct the mediation.

If the Circuit Mediation Officer does not conduct the mediation, the Circuit Mediation Officer selects a mediator from the court's list with the following exception. If counsel, under the program, jointly propose a mediator not on the list, then the Circuit Mediation Officer has the option of appointing that mediator, provided the parties agree to pay any travel, lodging, and out-of-pocket expenses of the mediator and the mediator agrees to serve pro bono. Parties are free, of course, to participate in mediation outside the court's program under terms to which they agree, whether or not the case is selected for mediation under the court program.

Before final selection of a mediator, the Circuit Mediation Officer inquires about conflicts of interest. The mediator must not presently represent either party for any purpose, must disclose any past relationships that he or she had with counsel, counsels' firms, and the parties, and must disclose any potential "issues" conflicts. Mediators are required to decline from participating in any cases in which there is a conflict of interest, in which they perceive a conflict, or in which a reasonable person would perceive a conflict.

E. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is ensured throughout the mediation process except as noted in this document. The Circuit Mediation Officer does not communicate with the judges about the substance of mediation proceedings. During the program, however, the Mediation Committee from time to time has discussions with the Circuit Mediation Officer with a view to revising the program while it is ongoing, as appropriate and necessary. Communications concerning statistical information and information needed to assess the program are not prohibited. All mediators must protect the confidentiality of the substance of all proceedings and are prohibited from complying with subpoenas or other requests for information about mediated cases. All communication with the court about mediation matters is between the mediator and the Circuit Mediation Officer.

The substance of mediation is confidential. The fact that a case is in mediation is confidential unless all participants agree otherwise. Any motions for extensions of time that are filed because the parties are engaged in mediation are part of the public file in the clerk's office. Section G sets forth the procedures for seeking extensions of time. If all participants agree that the fact that a case is in mediation need not be kept confidential, then the parties are not prohibited from public disclosure or mentioning that fact in their briefs or at oral argument. In any event, parties may respond to questions from the bench at oral argument about the fact of mediation.

F. Mandatory Mediation Process

Mediation is a flexible process. The mediator is not bound by a defined formula or approach to mediating a case and the mediator conducts the mediation as he or she deems appropriate. Mediation ceases at any time the mediator concludes that further efforts will not be fruitful.

The purpose of mediation is a settlement of the case. This may include a global settlement. Under the program, the mediator is not asked to narrow the issues on appeal. To the extent that the parties agree to narrow the issues, that may be reflected in their briefs.

If the Circuit Mediation Officer determines that mediation may be fruitful, then principal counsel must participate in any initial telephone conference that is ordered. The initial telephone conference may be arranged and conducted in any manner by the Circuit Mediation Officer, by an outside mediator, or both. If an initial telephone conference is ordered, then participation is mandatory. If the participants agree that a telephone conference is not necessary and that they wish to meet for a mediation session, then no telephone conference will be ordered. If, in the judgment of the mediator, a mediation session might be fruitful, then participation in at least one session is mandatory.

The court requires that principal counsel attend all sessions and that, at least one time during the process, counsel and the parties (or someone with actual settlement authority) meet face to face. This latter requirement may be modified or waived by the mediator, if the Circuit Mediation Officer concurs and if circumstances dictate. Additionally, if the United States government is one of the parties, the mediator may waive this requirement by allowing a senior government attorney without authority to settle to attend if someone with settlement authority can be reached by telephone during the mediation session. If government settlement decisions must be made collectively, then a senior attorney who is authorized to negotiate on behalf of the government and make recommendations concerning settlement must be present. When settlement authority rests with an official at the rank of Assistant Attorney General, its equivalent, or higher, then the requirement that the official be reachable during the mediation session may be waived.

G. Briefing and Oral Argument Schedule Extensions

It is contemplated that after a case is referred to a mediator, mediation should be completed in 90 days. At the outside, mediation should be completed within 150 days of the

date of reference. Cases generally are selected before the first brief is filed. However, cases in which briefs have been filed may also be selected. While cases in mediation remain subject to the normal scheduling for briefs and oral argument by the clerk's office, counsel are of course free to file a consent motion for an extension of time pursuant to Fed. Cir. R. 27(h)(4) in the ordinary course. If the mediator believes that multiple mediation sessions are required, that the filing of a brief or the scheduling of oral argument will interfere with good faith settlement efforts, and that additional extensions of time are needed, then motions for additional extensions may be filed. A motion for an extension, beyond the time granted under Rule 27(h)(4), is referred to the Circuit Mediation Officer. The court has given the Circuit Mediation Officer the authority to grant motions for extensions, upon the showing of good cause, up to a date that is generally no more than 150 days after a case is referred to a mediator. Any consent motion for an extension of time under this paragraph need not disclose that the extension is sought in order to facilitate mediation.

Any motions for extensions of time are entered on the docket in the ordinary course. In addition to an original and three copies, movant must file one additional copy prominently stamped "Direct to the Circuit Mediation Officer."

H. The Conclusion of Mediation

The purpose of the mediation program is to help the parties achieve settlement. If settlement is reached, then the agreement must be in writing and binding on all parties. The appellant or the parties jointly must file a motion or stipulation of voluntary dismissal or other appropriate motion. If the case is not settled, then it remains on the docket and proceeds as if mediation had not been initiated.

I. Noncompliance Sanctions

Any party, counsel or outside mediator who fails to materially comply with any of the provisions of this document, including failing to cooperate with the Circuit Mediation Officer, may be subject to appropriate sanction by the court.

J. Evaluation

At the conclusion of the mediation process in an individual case, the mediator notifies the Circuit Mediation Officer of the resolution of the mediation. The Circuit Mediation Officer sends a questionnaire to counsel and the mediator inviting their candid confidential responses, which are not provided to the judges or others, about the effectiveness of the program. The questionnaire responses are summarized by the Circuit Mediation Officer – without identification of any specific case – for purposes of evaluating the program, compiling statistics, etc. The summary is provided to the court for purposes of assessing the program, but it does not reveal any details about or names of specific cases. In a case in which the Circuit Mediation Officer serves as the mediator, the Circuit Mediation Officer shall prepare the response to the mediation questionnaire.